



1968: The Year That Rocked the World

By Mark Kurlansky

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In this monumental new book, award-winning author Mark Kurlansky has written his most ambitious work to date: a singular and ultimately definitive look at a pivotal moment in history.

With *1968*, Mark Kurlansky brings to teeming life the cultural and political history of that world-changing year of social upheaval. People think of it as the year of sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Yet it was also the year of the Martin Luther King Jr. and Bobby Kennedy assassinations; the riots at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago; Prague Spring; the antiwar movement and the Tet Offensive; Black Power; the generation gap, avant-garde theater, the birth of the women's movement, and the beginning of the end for the Soviet Union. From New York, Miami, Berkeley, and Chicago to Paris, Prague, Rome, Berlin, Warsaw, Tokyo, and Mexico City, spontaneous uprisings occurred simultaneously around the globe.

Everything was disrupted. In the Middle East, Yasir Arafat's guerilla organization rose to prominence . . . both the Cannes Film Festival and the Venice Biennale were forced to shut down by protesters . . . the Kentucky Derby winner was stripped of the crown for drug use . . . the Olympics were a disaster, with the Mexican government having massacred hundreds of students protesting police brutality there . . . and the Miss America pageant was stormed by feminists carrying banners that introduced to the television-watching public the phrase "women's liberation."

Kurlansky shows how the coming of live television made 1968 the first global year. It was the year that an amazed world watched the first live telecast from outer space, and that TV news expanded to half an hour. For the first time, Americans watched that day's battle—the Vietnam War's Tet Offensive—on the evening news. Television also shocked the world with seventeen minutes of police clubbing demonstrators at the Chicago convention, live film of unarmed students facing Soviet tanks in Czechoslovakia, and a war of starvation in Biafra. The impact was huge, not only on the antiwar movement, but also on the medium itself. The fact that one now needed television to make things happen was a cultural revelation with enormous consequences.

In many ways, this momentous year led us to where we are today. Whether through youth and music, politics and war, economics and the media, Mark

Kurlansky shows how, in *1968*, twelve volatile months transformed who we are as a people. But above all, he gives a new understanding to the underlying causes of the unique historical phenomenon that was the year 1968. Thoroughly researched and engagingly written—full of telling anecdotes, penetrating analysis, and the author's trademark incisive wit—*1968* is the most important book yet of Kurlansky's noteworthy career.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Given its broad and vibrant subject, it would be quite difficult for a writer of any proficiency to pen a boring book on 1968, and Mark Kurlansky has indeed pulled together an entertaining and enlightening popular history with *1968: The Year That Rocked the World*. With the Vietnam War and Soviet repression providing sparkplugs in the East and West, student movements heated up in Berkeley, Prague, Mexico City, Paris, and dozens of other hotspots. With youth in ascendancy, music, film, and athletics became generational battlegrounds between opposition forces that couldn't be more appalled with one another. Not so fortuitously, the Summer Olympics in Mexico City and a presidential election in the United States conspired to elevate the tension higher as months passed. Kurlansky is skilled at concisely capturing the personalities behind the conflicts, whether they be heartbroken Czech leader Alexander Dubcek as Eastern Bloc troops violently suppress his nation's uprising or respected veteran newsman Walter Cronkite reluctantly editorializing against the war in Vietnam. The author is more than willing to choose heroes (the doomed Robert Kennedy) and villains (victorious presidential candidate Richard Nixon), and clearly sides with the rebels in most cases. In general, Kurlansky is more adept at covering the political front than he is the equally revolutionary arts world, and it's apparent that any chapter in this book could be expanded into a book of its own. One's expectation is that captivated readers will view *1968* as a portal into a deeper exploration of a fascinating time. --Steven Stolder

From Publishers Weekly

By any measure, it was a remarkable year. Mentioning the Tet offensive, the My Lai massacre, the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy, the Democratic convention in Chicago, and the Prague Spring and its backlash gives only the merest impression of how eventful and transformative the year must have felt at the time. As Kurlansky (Cod, Salt, etc.) has made the phrase "changed the world" a necessary component of subtitles for books about mundane objects, his choice to focus on a year that so "rocked" the world is appropriate. To read this book is to be transported to a very specific past at once more naive and more mature than today; as Kurlansky puts it, it was a time of "shocking modernism" and "quaint innocence," a combination less contradictory than it first appears. The common genesis of demonstrations occurring in virtually every Western nation was the war in Vietnam. Without shortchanging the roles of race and age, Kurlansky shrewdly emphasizes the rise of television as a near-instantaneous (and less packaged than today) conduit of news as key to the year's unfolding. To his credit, Kurlansky does not overdo Berkeley at the expense of Paris or Warsaw or Mexico City. The gains and costs of the new ethic of mass demonstration are neatly illustrated by the U.S. presidential campaign: the young leftists helped force the effective abdication of President Lyndon Johnson - and were rewarded with "silent majority" spokesman Richard Nixon. 1968 is a thorough and loving (perhaps a bit too loving of the boomer generation) tapestry - or time capsule.

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Kurlansky is master of small ceremonies. Author of *Salt: A World History* and *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World*, he examines another deceptively small thing in 1968: a year. He draws together disparate people and events in a global portrait of revolutionary change. Kurlansky is the first to admit that his youthful, anti-Vietnam bent is anything but objective; after all, he came of age during the turbulent '60s. Yet, rather than romanticize his (and, it seems, many sympathetic critics') former causes, he offers an accessible, generally unbiased account of the year. He provides scant explanation of the origins of this near-global revolution; nor does he link the events of 1968 to the present day. Still, it's the best biography of a

year we have. And those who lived through it will, as they read *1968*, relive an intensely personal journey.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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